

BOOK REVIEW

Moths of Australia by Bernard D'Abrera. 1974 Lansdowne Press, Melbourne. 85 pages, 25 cm by 19 cm, including 47 colour and 13 black and white plates. Price \$12.95.

In this slim volume Australian moths are treated in four main sections: "Characteristics and Behaviour of Moths", "Classification and Nomenclature", "Making a Moth Collection", and "The Moths (by Family)".

The first two sections are based on recent texts and provide background information on the biology and classification. Some minor inaccuracies have been noted, as well as the following more serious errors. Contrary to the implied generalisation that external ocelli occur in the adults of all moths (p. 18, l. 41), they are in fact absent throughout several large families of moths, such as Geometridae, and throughout the butterflies (including the skippers). The frenulum in advanced moths can in no way be regarded as the homologue of the jugum in homoneurous moths (cf. p. 20, l. 21). The known blood-sucking moth, *Calyptra eustrigata* (Hampson) (Noctuidae) occurs in Malaya, not in South America (p. 20, l. 38). And it is nonsense to say that every species is characterised by at least two common names (p. 30, l. 12).

The section on "Making a Moth Collection" is a strange mixture of fact and supercilious humour. The author attempts to discourage readers from making a moth collection (although stating in an earlier book that he himself has a butterfly collection), on the grounds that a killing bottle is "diabolical" and to kill moths is "barbaric". If such sentiments were universally accepted our knowledge of the vast array of insects, both harmful and harmless, would have remained in the pre-Linnean era! What an opportunity the author has missed in not presenting the case for insect conservation by the preservation of habitats. He claims (p. 33, l. 13) that the human "physiognomy" (i.e. facial form) is not well designed for the "pursuit and capture of insects"! The procedure recommended (p. 34, l. 16) for the preparation of a killing bottle is ludicrous; if the jar is first filled with sawdust, there will be no room for the other ingredients, let alone the specimens to be killed! The purpose of including chlorocresol with relaxed specimens is to prevent mould growth in a moist container, not to prevent hardening of the wing muscles (p. 34, l. 30).

Some 323 species in 38 of the Australian moth families are figured in colour in the fourth and major section of the book, designed primarily for identification. Unfortunately, there are errors in the names of at least 118 species; these include misidentifications, misspellings, wrong or misspelled authors' names, or occasionally transposed names. Some names contain more than one error. Examples of such errors are (correct name in brackets): *Zelotypia staceyi* Scott (*Zelotypia stacyi* Scott), *Helicosma rhapidoana* Walker (*Helicosma rhodopnoana* Meyrick), *Mnesempala comarcha* Meyrick (*Mnesampela comarcha* Guest), *Spilosoma glatignyi* Le Guillon (*Spilosoma glatignyi* Le Guillou), and *Phyllodes merricci*

Olliffe (*Phyllodes meyricki* Olliff). The name of A. Guenée, who described numerous Australian Geometridae, Pyralidae and Noctuidae, has been consistently rendered as "Guérin", the abbreviated form of F. E. Guérin-Ménéville, who named butterflies and other insects, but few if any Australian moths. In addition, the author throughout the book has contravened Article 51 (d) of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* by omitting brackets from authors' names when the species has been assigned to a genus other than the original. It is a pity that the potential value of this book for correctly identifying many of our common moths is thus drastically limited. More careful attention to name-checking and proof-reading, especially by an author lacking personal familiarity with his subject, would have greatly increased the book's value.

Moths of Australia is well printed on good quality paper. Some of the photographs of living moths are excellent, especially that of *Hippotion scrofa* (p. 21), which is also used on the handsome dust jacket. An exception is the plate of *Agarista agricola* on lantana (p. 79), a colourful picture but scarcely informative, since only part of the hindwing is in focus. The photographs of mounted specimens vary in quality; some are good, and most are adequate for recognition. As a whole the book contributes little to our technical literature and provides a reference of only limited value to the serious naturalist or amateur entomologist interested in these insects, although it may have some appeal on the coffee table.

I. F. B. COMMON.

RECENT LITERATURE

Compiled by M. S. Moulds

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